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HANS SACHS.

I.

[From Gervinus's History of German Poetry: ch. vii. sec. 7.]

Translated by Rev. C. T. Brooks.

THE first who darkly felt that the whole body of poetry had sunk to a depth at which it could not possibly stay, was Hans Sachs (of Nuremberg 1494-1576). We must say of the truly German phenomenon of this man's appearing, as of everything genuinely national that we possess in the poetry of the middle ages, it is necessary to appreciate him historically in order to recognize his services, and by them to estimate his worth. He stands midway between old and new Art, pointing with his works to former things which the nation had created, and laying the basis for later things which it was to create; he embraces the poetic past of the people, and treats in manifold ways all forms and subjects which, since the rise of civic poetry, had grown into favor; he grasps all that was passing in his time, and keeps abreast with the whole course of religious-political poetry; he then first recedes from this, takes poetry out of its direction towards actual life, and throws himself into the dramatic form, which has ever since remained the leading one of all modern poetry. He draws all history and the whole circle of science and action into poetry, leaps the bounds of nationality; and thus indicates what henceforth was to be for German poetry the most characteristic element. He is, in a certain sense, a reformer in poetry, like Luther in religion, like Hutten in politics; more fortunate than the latter, less so than the former, of more unconscious talent, far, than either; like them, inexhaustibly busy, little understood, and, for a long time, derided as champion of the school of the Meistersingers, from which he tore himself free, for which he only privately poetized, in which he only morally valued what he poetically thought not worth printing. Not until the latest times, through Goethe, who discovered the germs in his poetic forms and his language, has he been brought back to respect and recognition, so that now one may venture to name the venerable old master beside the heads of the age of the Reformation, which in great spirits and characters was so fruitful and fortunate.

We stand, at the time of Hans Sachs, in the midst of a second main direction of our German poesy. We observed, at the close of the primitive popular poetry, a great development first among the nobility and at courts; another, not less remarkable, followed among the lower classes. The former was, in its predominant kinds, epic and lyric, the latter, didactic and satirical; the former worked wholly upon entertaining and captivating materials, the latter upon unvarnished manners; the former, although mostly narrative, was yet less plastic than the latter, which aimed chiefly at instruction, indeed, but preferred for this purpose narrative example; the former applied itself with sentimental intention to the ideal, to purity and propriety, the latter, with blunt, boorish recklessness, to the grotesque

and to caricature; the former was all decorum, the latter all coarse nature; in the former all was full of feeling, in the latter, all was full of mother-wit and sound sense. The elder Art was musical and full of sensibility, the later popular school was alive and all creative; sport in the latter crowded out the seriousness of the former, the vulgar excluded the sublime, the abstract gave place to matter of fact, the sacred and the solemn to the loose and licentious, courtliness to coarseness, carefulness to levity; the greatest negligence took the place of the most painful consideration, natural philosophy replaced the mystic-spiritual and sophistical, the old God of the fathers superseded the new idols with their insane *cultus*. The chivalric poetry was, in its matter, mostly foreign, the popular was patriotic; in the one everything pointed away from reality, in the other, everything pointed to it. If, in the one, observation of life went for nothing, in the other it was everything; if, there, sound sense was less active, here, on the other hand, the imagination had almost no part in poetry; if, there, poetry had less reference to the present and surrounding circumstances, here, all was occasional poetry. We have passed from one extreme clear over to the other, and even locality announces to us this change. Before, we stood always in the west and south, now we move towards the east and north. Art has regularly taken its march from west to east, from south to north, just as the culture of the middle ages generally did; but as its progress thither was checked by the too great rudeness of races and roughness of climate, so modern culture, like trade and commerce, that took *en masse* a southerly and westwardly direction, set westward with a similar grand movement from Constantinople, Prague, and Wittenberg; and it cannot be denied, that only simultaneously with this natural direction, which all really advancing culture has ever taken, did the more natural and truly progressive element in our Art also begin to appear.

That courtly poesy had been nursed by a class which had, it is true, been created for war and emigration and foreign business, but by the peculiar state of the times, was deliberately attached to house and home, to wives and peaceful society, when it produced its poetry; this popular poesy was practised by philosophers and artisans, who were designed by nature for house and chamber, but who, by the peculiar condition of these later times, were set upon travels and communication. In the same degree that want of acquaintance with human nature had injured the courtly poets, had too much intercourse with men of the common sort injured the poets of the popular class. In the same degree that the want of great incidents at home had left the poesy of the knights poor and stagnant, did the great internal events of the age of the Reformation damage the poetry of that time, as we have circumstantially seen. The torrent of these events had carried so many a one away, the vulgar tone of the movement party of the day had spoiled language and all that is most indispensable to poesy. Into the midst of this culture, of these circum-

stances, falls the life of Hans Sachs, into the midst of the good and evil fortunes of the new doctrine; and the first years of his youth coincide with the first commotions. If, like so many others, he had let himself be carried away by them, with his zeal and his talents, it would have been no wonder; if he had struck in with the general turn, after the first applause, he could have excused himself with the precedent of such great men! What a nature, then, it shows, that this man could with such circumstantial and impressive versatility follow the condition of his age and people, fathom and depict, praise and blame it, without wavering in his thoughtfulness, without sinking from the height whence he surveyed things. All the crowd of incidents, the enormous movement of that time, are unfolded to us in the countless works of the honest cobbler, livingly and speakingly, but not passionately; strikingly and impressively, but without restlessness, without pains or design. He leads us into the plebeian swarms, but we see at once that he belongs to the nobler ones who had retired into a pure society. He shows us the whole world in its driving commotion and hurry, unconfused himself, from his still cloister, in which nothing escapes him, nothing leaves him indifferent, but nothing robs him of his equanimity. He sees through the manifold defects of the empire, but he does not propose to reform them. All one sees is, that he is a citizen of a town which stood at that time in an enviable flourishing state of well-being, economy, and culture; whose prosperity had been praised by every poet since Rosenblut, described by every writer since Æneas Silvius, whose constitution every enlightened man envied; which not only produced and retained great talents, but knew also how to attract to itself foreign talents, two things which hardly any other republic ever understood at once; which, great in trade and manufactures, in mechanics and inventions, in arts and sciences, was the focus and high school of minstrelsy; which, for more than a hundred years, from Rosenblut and Folz to Hans Sachs and Ayrrer, remained the chief cradle of the German drama, and which held within its walls the greatest men in all departments, a Regiomontanus, a Celtes, a Vischer, a Dürer, a Pirkheimer, a Hans Sachs; which displayed such a fruitfulness in artists and literati, that in no German city could the annals of art and literature surpass, in many a German country could not compare with hers, which only those of the great Italian republics, and they only in part, have outstripped. In this place of refuge, full of incitement, yet free from excitement, he found it easier to observe, easy to master and manage the results of his observation; he over-looked all from a distance, and did not confuse himself with a near view. Once, when the Reformation penetrated to Nuremberg, he, in company with Andreas Osiander, one of that zealous anti-Catholic family, put out a writing against the Papacy,* which had very seldom occurred, because the

Council of Nuremberg forbade it. On this occasion, the council was concerned that this book had eluded the censorship, gravely reprimanded Hans Sachs for it, and showed him that such was not a part of his office, and misbecame him; that therefore it was proper for a council seriously to enjoin upon him that he should stick to his trade and his shoemaking, and refrain from publishing any books or rhymes from that time forward. For that time the injunction was obeyed, and after that was no longer necessary. For, as even in that pamphlet, his poetical share was very innocent, so, too, subsequently, his contributions to Protestantism were, though sharp and decided, always moderate and calm, and perfectly free from all extravagance in manner and in matter. His championship of the good cause could not have interested a Hutten, but it interested the quiet Melancthon; it could not evoke any stormy commotion, could not make, but could assert, conquest. When Hutten roused the nation, there was no place for Hans Sachs; but when Hutten was already forgotten and his influence lost, Hans Sachs held on steadily in his (since more sought-for) poems, and in the darker times of the sixteenth century, every simple Lutheran clergyman and every honest artisan adhered to the sturdy master, and called his and Hans Von Schwarzenberg's poems* the moral guide-posts of the people, since already the squabbles of the theologians were beginning to throw everything again into confusion. He counteracted the common tone of life and art, not, like Murner, in imitating that roughness, but in seeking to raise his speech and his representations, and to keep himself above common reality.

The way in which he did this, shows what an inborn poetic talent he possessed. And this is what so attached Goethe to him (who knew himself how hard it is to keep one's self superior to the pressure of temporary relations), that he saw how lightly and sportively the honest master handled the world and life, how securely and undisturbedly he moved about therein, how the original creative force of the poet worked in him, not passion or personal sympathy and emotion; how his poetry is not a flat copy of life, but a free representation. It is true we can only speak, in his case, of talent, not of cultivation; only of force and expression, and the great humorous power of his language, which under Goethe's finishing hand made us feel so much at home, while in him the monotony and fluency with which he pours out his rhymes, fatigues and repels. It is true there is much in his works of idle gossip, of awkwardness in the handling, of indiscriminate laying hold upon the first convenient subject, and later, of soulless writing-on from habit. But one can be lenient even to this simple poetizing, when it regards men as of one stamp, is unassuming and easily contented, and at the core thoroughly sound, cheerful, reconciling, and refreshing. There is something fascinating about a talent like Lope de Vega's, which is ready to develop itself with ease in all directions, that every-

* A singular prediction of the Papacy, how it is to fare till the end of the world, comprised in figures or pictures, found at Nuremberg, in the Carthusian Cloister, and is very old. A preface by Andreas Osiander, etc., 1527.

* Printed at the end of his German Cicero.

where only touches upon the right and good, with security and naïveté, sees what is better, and voluntarily lets it go, which scorns rules, serves the people, satisfies the multitude, and pleases itself within itself. Hans Sachs is no Lope de Vega, although he composed many thousands of poetic pieces, and perhaps is not second in fruitfulness; but neither is Lope a Hans Sachs, however sound and strong he may be. With a lively genius, with southern blood, with fourteen years of ripening, with a language highly cultivated, and easily adapting itself to verse and rhyme, amidst a people fond of spectacle and stormy in its applause, with a free muse and a careless soul, to be an author like Lope is, perhaps, not so difficult; but amidst great events of public life, with so much sympathy and sentiment, to remain always a man like Hans Sachs, is wonderful; more wonderful than that he sought to make a completely sunken poesy bloom up again freshly and bear new seeds for further plantings. It was a time when so many meddled, uncalled, with things that did not concern them; when so many lost or mistook their position. But how Hans Sachs, after the muses had in his twentieth year once called him to the work of poetry, endowed him with their gifts, inspired him for the song of virtue, for the enlivening of sadness, and he, tied to his modest occupation, had in the beginning obeyed their call with somewhat of reluctance,—how he from that time forward, even when the applause of Germany already loudly honored him, always, in the same proportion, restrained himself with modesty and self-knowledge, and ever remained the poetic craftsman, the business poet,—how he in life kept the same tone, which his poems also breathe,—this is easier to notice than to comprehend. He might have contended with Hutten as to which of them best knew men, most attentively heeded the actual relations in Germany, and took most warmly to heart the destinies of the fatherland and of its culture and improvement, and yet his poems upon the relations of the times, compared with Hutten's, form a perfect contrast of repose to restlessness, of modesty to bold self-confidence, of moderation to enormous passion; and, as regards poetic treatment, of considerate mastery over the subject to the being mastered by the subject. To write armed speeches never entered his head, even where he was most vehement; to mix in personalities and take up the tone of warfare, the quiet man did not feel himself called; nay, when he praises Luther the most warmly, he hardly names him. To inflict wounds with pen or sword lay not so near his heart as to heal wounds, and he pointed back to gentleness, which rather laughs at the faults of men than curses them. He wisely aspired not to address rousing appeals to the people, but laid before them what was upon his mind in a sort of plain allegories; he wrote no hortatory letters to Emperor, Pope, or realm, but he represented the gods as conversing about them in deliberative assembly; and with his quiet humor did more service, perhaps, than others with the lash of the whip. He did not, like Luther, preach with tongue of fire, for he well knew

that the tone of the pulpit or prophet did not become him in his cell. He grappled not with theologians and disputed no theses, kept aloof from scholastic questions, which not long before had been no such very strange subjects to the Meistersingers; he held to the Book of books, which he knew and understood in its simplicity, set his face against the immorality of high and low, went among the the ignorant monks and little popes, to whom every honest man was superior. He allowed not himself to be carried away by the coarse style of writing of the times; in his greatest anger and indignation he never rails as Luther, and as even the ruling spirits of the age did; his style is strong and rich, almost as much so as that of any of his contemporaries; it is innocent, lively, and bright, by the side of Murner's, much more poetic, contemplative, impressive, and noble than Hutten's, full of health and pure humor compared with Fischart's, and, next to Luther's, his phraseology is far the most noteworthy of the century; to every later national humorist and satirist it is a rich fountain.

Our purpose does not permit us to introduce the reader to the whole body of Hans Sachs' poems. They fall into two great periods, which, for the historical judgment of them, it is of the highest importance to consider. In the one he is occupied, like all authors of the age, with the present in its collective movement; in the latter he leaves this and goes back to the past. Or, to speak more precisely, he occupies himself in the first period with public life, with Church and State; in the second more with private life, and at the same time with the rejuvenizing of old poetic matter in a new and dramatic dress. In the firstlings of his muse he is wholly devoted to the question of chaste love, which to every inwardly living man usually occasions the first struggle. He shows himself there to have downright citizenly sentiments, and praises wedded love above the adventurous, as every well-disposed man in our day holds it his duty to do. He gives it to be understood very early (1517) in his *Court of Venus*, how little it would suit him to conceive of love and its nature otherwise. He advises early and late, in his youthful poem, upon *Banished Chastity* (wherein the strict copies which he sets himself do high honor to his fine character), as well as in his judgment upon the late-treated subject of *Tristan*, the saving of love for marriage; and the sacredness of this state is also, in his serious and comic works, the perpetual centre around which his domestic moral poetry loves best to turn. When he thoughtfully inquires by himself, or his homely genius goes eaves-dropping, when he peeps into the interior of family life, or when he accompanies his Ulysses to Calypso and Circe, he has it in hand to praise wedlock, to scourge the prevailing infidelity, to mourn the discord of spouses, to revile and curse the bad domestic life in cities and villages. When we remember that this pure man lived early enough to see in his youth how from the very midst of the priests and monks, whose rules tempted them into the violation of this chaste love, from the midst of these privileged adulterers and scorners of marriage, Luther came out

against them, we shall not wonder that the downright man joined himself to this side with inward exultation, and warmly embraced the new doctrine, with unwearied study mastered the evangelic texts and made them his, caught, with uncommon tact, the language, the tone, and the application of them to the people, and at last was led on by them to the more remote source of the reformatory spirit, namely, the ancients, and entered into them with a love which, in manifold ways, penetrates his works. So early as 1523 he wrote his famous Wittenberg Nightingale, and welcomed the new doctrine with so much decidedness, that it needs only a glance into this poem to recognize its bearing upon the Reformation, and at the same time to discern in what way Luther's doctrine struck and awoke long slumbering thoughts in the minds of the honest middling class in Germany, how the upright and downright understanding of this class, with the Testament in its hand for a guide, now, of itself, threw light in every direction, how the honest burghers joined the singing Nightingale in greeting the day, how they obeyed her summons to come back from error, from the wilderness and night, whither the cunning lion had decoyed them, how they withstood all the yelping of the monsters in his service. Indignantly the honest poet, elaborating circumstantially a favorite old image, launches out against what the Pope calls God's service, against priestcraft and mumbling of prayers, against fasts and penances, confession and indulgence, and all mere fiction and human invention; against the impudence and uncleanness of the clergy, against the arbitrary decretals wherewith they oppress the sheep of the Lord; against all extortion of money at baptisms, marriages and deaths, at confirmation, confession and mass, with which they shear the Lord's sheep; against the muzzling of the people with tithes, against money-boxes and all begging inventions of that kind, wherewith they milk the sheep; against the chestfuls of bulls of indulgence and such like knavish contrivances, whereby they flay the sheep; against the misdoings at the bishops' courts, how they with excommunications, imposts, war, trespass and robbery of widows and orphans, devour the sheep; and, finally, against monks and nuns and all the lazy tribe who sell their good works for money, and suck the sheep like serpents. Against all these the new preacher recalls the simple doctrine of the Gospel: Love God, and thy neighbor as thyself. Upon all that relates to the new spiritual movements, upon the ideas of human rights and the dignity of subjects, of the validity of reason against arbitrary assertions of those in power, he is not in the least wavering, but free from all party-spirit, equally indignant at the tyranny of peasants and of princes, equally set against all opinionativeness on the part of Evangelists and of Romanists. Over the coffin of the God-man, at the time when such dark clouds were already beginning to obscure again the new light, he represents theology weeping,* who is disgraced, abused and pro-

faned by so many clergymen and sects. He sees, indeed, (II. 4, 100) that Luther's doctrine has annihilated the monkey-play of relics and sacraments; that the wise shut their purses; he consoles divine wisdom mourning over Luther's corpse, and extols the champions who will guard it from the unclean hands of the old monsters; but he does not deceive himself as to the unhappy influence of the sophistical controversial questions of the theologians, to which they have already sacrificed a firm adherence to the simple Testament. He sees the workings of the poison of manifold sects and factions, recognizes full well (I. 1, 81) that too many bear the Gospel only in their mouths, and deny it in their life, that there is still danger from those who idolize the Reformation, from the priests who politically blacken it, inasmuch that he makes the mourning Gospel exclaim, it will yet have to exile itself from the poor blind fatherland on account of the lip-Christians, Romanists and religionists,* without, however, either on the one hand, allowing himself to despair or to desert the good cause in its jeopardy, or, on the other, entering more minutely into the errors, the quibbles, the scholastic janglings of the theologians, in which he keenly recognized the consuming mischief of Protestantism.

Our desire to view things synthetically, or as a whole, is an instinct which cannot be disregarded. When the mind experiences a difficulty in doing this,—when the several parts of an object or composition present a resistance to its synthetical or symmetrizing power,—it imputes to such objects a character of force and energy, which purely symmetrical compositions do not suggest. But when unity is wholly wanting, nothing can atone for its absence; and the mind baffled in its instinctive efforts to combine the refractory parts in a whole, sees only discord and incompleteness in the object, and experiences nothing but dissatisfaction in itself. A picturesque landscape is the object in nature which exhibits beauty most divorced from symmetry; and hence picturesqueness has not been inaptly styled "a beauty of parts." But there is more in it than this, for a picturesque scene, however seemingly unsymmetrical, will be found, in its best aspect, to be symmetrized, at least aerially, by the influence of light, shade, and color, which bind together the isolated beauty-spots by a subtle but most visible bond of union. The soul of landscape-painting lies in the perception and embodiment of such effects, and in thus investing the pictured scene with a spirit and glory, which nature may reflect upon its archetype but for a fleeting moment. In truth, a good artist courts such skyeey influences as a poet courts the inspiration of the Muse; and will watch and wait for days for that "light from heaven" which is to render some favorite scene worthy of an immortality on canvas.—*Blackwood's Magazine*.

MODESTY is to merit as shades in a picture; giving it strength and beauty.—*Brugere*.

"So am I driven to and fro,
By parties three, where'er I go, where'er I be,
First by lip-Christians, then by both
Religionists and Romanists,
Three pairs of breeches of one cloth,
Which I to wear am loth."

* Heussler's edition of Hans Sachs' Works, 1570. I. 1, 94.